

Madam Chair, I rise in support of the Disaster Relief Act. This bill brings much needed aid to the residents of central New Jersey.

I am concerned that several amendments to H.R. 152 would impair the ability of money in the bill to be spent wisely. The amended bill includes a provision that would block funding that enables coastal communities to develop mitigation plans for future hurricanes and other severe weather events. We should not be limiting NOAA's ability to forecast and respond to hurricanes in an emergency appropriations bill that is designed to respond to a hurricane.

I intended to offer to H.R. 152 an amendment that would have lifted the \$250,000 cap on Community Development Block Grant Funds (CDBG) that can be used by towns and municipalities to finance critically need infrastructure projects. There are towns in my district that would benefit from upgrades to existing flood management infrastructure, yet are unable to afford the costs associated with these projects. Unfortunately, my amendment was not made in order by the House Leadership.

While I support strongly passage of H.R. 152, I want to reiterate that our fellow citizens affected by Hurricane Sandy have already waited far too long for help from Congress. In other natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, Congress acted swiftly, and aid reached those in need. And yet, the 112th Congress adjourned before passing a much-needed disaster relief package. The Senate had already acted to pass a well-constructed aid package bill. The only reason that this bill is not law today is that House leadership refused to act.

This devastating storm has left many people hurting in many different ways--shopkeepers, homeowners, fishermen, hotel and restaurant owners--and has damaged the entire economy. H.R. 152 responds to this variety of needs and concerns. I urge my colleagues to support the bill.